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3-28-07

Kolak
cc: Borries
e-mailed to others
ilmt



Mick Hans/R5/USEPA/US

03/28/2007 04:43 PM

To

Subject Kazoo River media roundup 3-28-07

Today, I spoke to Kaz Gazette beat reporter Chris Killian for a story leading up to April 2's EPA meeting with local officials. Lots of questions about what might come out of the meeting. I declined to speculate, but stressed that we believed the cleanup plan EPA and partner agencies introduced a month ago was a good one. Also that technical merits of the plan aside, we want to begin this project on a positive note that builds momentum for addressing the entire NPL site. And yes, we are certainly open to additional meetings, conversations, and public outreach with local officials and area residents. NOTE: Killian said he may attempt to attend the Monday meeting. I said that was up to local Sunshine laws.

Yesterday, Sam Borries spoke to another reporter at the Kaz Gaz about Rep. Upton's letter. And Karen Thompson assisted Shari Kolak and Larry Schmitt with calls to WOOD-TV NBC 8, WXMI-TV Fox 17, Michigan News Network (NPR Ann Arbor) and Midwest Radio News. Various stories follow, including the public meeting coverage in the Allegan County News and the news release from Upton's office.

If new calls come in, please route them to me. If I'm not around, please try OPA's Don DeBlasio, Karen Thompson or Phillipa Cannon. Thanks. 3-5050.

For Immediate Release
March 26, 2007
Contact: Sean C. Bonyun
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EPA Region 5 Records Ctr.



294968

Upton to EPA - Too Many Unanswered Questions to Start Dumping Now

Rep. deeply concerned that transfer of toxins will commence before the EPA sits down with local officials

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Fred Upton (R-St. Joseph) today urged the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to delay the scheduled transfer of contaminated sediment from the Kalamazoo River cleanup to the Allied Paper landfill in Kalamazoo. The EPA is scheduled to start dumping the PCB-contaminated sediment beginning April 1st. Upton wants to ensure that there is adequate opportunity for local officials to voice their concerns with the proposed dumping site.

"The purity of our drinking water is at stake," said Upton. "I have grave concerns that wedging the toxins between two neighborhoods will have significant, unintended consequences, and I am hopeful that the EPA will allow for the opportunity for local officials to have our concerns heard. The stakes are much too high to rush the plan."

The full text of the letter to EPA Region V Administrator Mary Gade is below:

Dear Administrator Gade:

I write to express my strong concern regarding the recent agreement between the EPA, Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality, Georgia Pacific, Millennium Holdings and others pertaining to the cleanup of the Allied Paper/Portage Creek/Kalamazoo River Superfund site. That agreement dictates that the PCB-containing sediment resulting from the cleanup in Plainwell will be stored at the Allied Paper Inc. landfill in Kalamazoo. Though I am pleased to see that the cleanup of the Kalamazoo River is progressing, I am quite concerned about the impact of storing contaminated sediment within the Kalamazoo city limits and adjacent to several densely-populated neighborhoods.

I have been contacted by numerous local officials and citizens from the city of Kalamazoo expressing concern that the proposed storage site could possibly contaminate aquifers that provide drinking water to over 100,000 citizens in the greater Kalamazoo area. I share their concerns and am also alarmed that the closed-door nature of the negotiations leading to the agreement did not allow these issues to be publicly addressed. City officials have every right to harbor reservations about the impact on the environment and potential risks to the water that they drink.

It is my understanding that the parties involved with the agreement plan on holding meetings with Kalamazoo officials and other interested parties in early April. It is also my understanding that the transportation of sediment to the Allied Paper site is scheduled to begin on April 1st. It would be good policy to convene the meetings with Kalamazoo prior to the movement of the contaminated sediment.

I would like to respectfully ask you to consider delaying the transfer of the sediment for one month, to May 1st, in order to allow for greater public disclosure and comment and to ensure that the concerns can be adequately addressed.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your prompt response.

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PCB dumping start unclear EPA plans local talks about toxic waste from river cleanup

Tuesday, March 27, 2007

By Tom Haroldson

tharoldson@kalamazoo Gazette.com 388-8545

Dumping of toxic Kalamazoo River sediment into a landfill near Cork and South Burdick streets in Kalamazoo won't start until late May at the earliest, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said this morning.

Cleanup of sediment and soil from a 1.5-mile stretch of the Kalamazoo River near Plainwell, meanwhile, will continue as scheduled starting in April, said Sam Borries, EPA on-site coordinator for the Plainwell project.

EPA officials will meet with Kalamazoo city officials and residents before any of 132,000 cubic yards of material containing polychlorinated biphenyls from the river are dumped at the former Allied Paper Inc. landfill.

"We would not be ready to dispose until later in May," Borries said of river cleanup process. "We have scheduled meetings with the city of Kalamazoo, commissioners from the city, and we're trying to schedule meetings with neighborhood associations."

On Monday, U.S. Rep. Fred Upton, R-St. Joseph, sent a letter to EPA Region V Administrator Mary Gade asking that dumping of river sediment in the Kalamazoo landfill be delayed until at least May 1.

"The purity of our drinking water is at stake," Upton said in the letter. "I have grave concerns that wedging the toxins between two neighborhoods will have significant, unintended consequences, and I am hopeful that the EPA will allow for the opportunity for local officials to have our concerns heard."

"The stakes are too high to rush the plan," the letter said.

"We are replying to Rep. Upton's letter today," Borries said this morning.

"Basically, what we are saying is that there is no need for a delay because disposal was not going to occur until later in May."

The EPA is currently gathering "geotechnical" data at the Cork and Burdick landfill, he said, to ensure that earlier data showing the site's ability to handle the disposal is correct.

Upton's letter addresses similar concerns expressed by U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, who said while meeting Saturday with about 100 people at the Washington Square Library in Kalamazoo that he had also drafted a letter to Gade.

The EPA has insisted that disposing of PCBs in the landfill poses no risk. PCBs have been present in the landfill for more than 50 years without reports of harmful levels of the toxins seeping into groundwater, EPA said.

Upton said he's not convinced about the safety of adding more PCBs, and that neither are the local officials and residents who have contacted him because they are concerned about possible effects on drinking water. He said area officials and residents need to be brought into discussions before any dumping begins.

City officials have indicated that they might go to court, if necessary, to stop or delay the dumping.

WOOD TV NBC Grand Rapids

Kalamazoo river cleanup creates city dump

Updated: March 28, 2007 10:11 AM CDT

KALAMAZOO -- Kalamazoo city officials and residents are fighting a plan to dump 4,400 pounds of toxic chemicals inside the city limits.

The Environmental Protection Agency plans to begin dredging the Kalamazoo River next month, removing toxic polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs from the water. For two decades, the chemical was used by paper companies and was dumped into the river.

That sediment will be shipped to a site near the intersection of Cork and Burdick. They have already begun to prepare the former Allied Paper Mill site to hold the chemicals. However, the site borders three Kalamazoo neighborhoods, and residents and the city are not happy about the plan.

"What we're against is having that polluted material, the contaminated waste piled in our neighborhood," says Gary Wager of the Oakwood Neighborhood Association.

"There's going to be 20 to 30 trucks a day, not just this summer but next summer," Kalamazoo Public Services Director Bruce Merchant told 24 Hour News 8.

State and federal environmental officials have assured the city the site is safe. The EPA says the site is already contaminated from the former plant, and the added PCBs are only one-tenth the concentration of the ones already there. The EPA says the site is only temporary. But residents are still concerned.

"If they start bringing this material in here now, what's to stop them from saying, 'Well, we got a good spot we'll bring all this material over here,'" says Wager.

City leaders are asking worried residents to contact their leaders in Congress. U.S. Representative Fred Upton has already made his concerns known to the EPA. The city has also indicated it might go to court to stop the dumping.

Plainwell PCB cleanup is step one, officials say

Sunday, March 25, 2007

By Chris Killian

Special to the Gazette

PLAINWELL -- Long-anticipated cleanup of a stretch of the Kalamazoo River polluted by decades of paper companies dumping waste is set to begin in April.

Ironically, that work is now threatened by legal action over plans to truck contaminated river sediment to a landfill already contaminated by the same toxins. Kalamazoo city officials said Friday they may seek a court injunction to prevent river material from being dumped in the Allied Paper Inc. landfill off Cork and Burdick streets until they can learn more about potential environmental effects.

A settlement nearly three years in the making would result in removal of nearly 132,000 cubic yards of material containing 4,400 pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls from a 1.5-mile stretch of the river, its banks and floodplains at and upstream of the Plainwell Dam.

It is the first step in what environmental officials hope will eventually be near complete removal of PCBs from an 80-mile stretch of the river, from the Morrow Lake Dam east of Kalamazoo downstream to Saugatuck.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and other federal and state agencies reached agreements with two companies that will finance the cleanup. Georgia-Pacific Corp. and Millennium Holdings Inc. will pay \$21 million for the cleanup and \$15 million to study whether there are PCB "hot spots" along the entire Superfund site.

High concentrations of PCBs are known to exist at Lake Allegan, formed by the Allegan Dam, and some amounts are likely to exist along the entire 80-mile stretch, EPA officials say. Dams, which can trap PCBs in sediment and soil on the river banks, and areas just upstream of them are believed to be among the most-polluted spots.

The EPA has estimated that upwards of 350,000 pounds of PCBs exist along the Superfund stretch and that cleaning them up could cost \$50 million to \$1.4 billion. The government would seek to identify potentially responsible parties and pursue cleanup agreements.

How it will work

Bulldozers, backhoes and front-end loaders will be used to scoop up material from river banks and bottom and floodplains. It will be dumped into trucks and taken to "de-watering" pads to be dried out.

With 51,500 of the 132,000 total cubic yards to be removed now underwater, much of the excavating will be done "in the dry." Contaminated sections of river bottom will be isolated with porta-dams and water deflectors to isolate them, and water will be pumped out for excavation of PCBs to take place.

The water level will be lowered in spots so PCBs can be removed from river banks and floodplains. In some places, material will be excavated down more than 5 feet.

A portion of the Plainwell Dam, a 100-foot-long combination of earth, broken concrete, debris and rocks that extends about 30 feet above the river surface, is to be removed at the beginning of the project and a temporary dam installed in its place. That temporary dam will be removed and the river will return to its natural flow when the project is complete.

A major concern is preventing PCB-laden sediments from being kicked up during excavation and sent downstream to settle in other areas, said Sam Borries, the EPA's on-scene coordinator. To capture disturbed sediment, silt curtains and fences will be extended from the river surface to its bottom.

Daily readings will be taken downstream to determine if PCBs are escaping control measures. If they are, Borries said "we would stop work immediately and look at what needs to be done to fix the problem."

"Some movement of contaminated sediment is likely," said Steve Kohler, director of Western Michigan University's Environmental Studies program. "But if the project is done the right way, the amount of PCBs sent downstream should be trivial."

Arcadis U.S. Inc., a Chicago-based engineering and consulting firm, will be in charge of the work, which will be done primarily from early spring through the fall. Work will be paused during cold-weather months and is expected to be completed by the end of 2008.

At the end of the first year of work, groundwater wells will be installed east of the Plainwell Dam to monitor possible PCB leeching. Data will be gathered from the wells for two years.

The EPA expects it will take four to five years to certify the site as clean.

Disposal concerns

Once work at the river is fully under way, 20 to 30 truckloads per day of material would be hauled to the Allied Paper

Inc. landfill in Kalamazoo for disposal under the EPA's plans. The landfill, along Portage Creek in a sprawling, abandoned papermaking complex, is owned by Millenium Holdings, parent company of Allied Paper and one of the two companies paying for the river cleanup.

Residents in surrounding neighborhoods have lodged concerns about truck traffic and potential environmental impacts of the dumping. The Kalamazoo Neighborhoods Council last week passed a resolution saying it is "a clear and present danger to the public health" and should be scrapped.

City officials have echoed residents' objections and are upset they were excluded from closed-door negotiations on the disposal plan. Bruce Merchant, the city's public services director, said officials are concerned about the lack of any study on the potential for the river PCBs to leach into aquifers that provide water to 100,000 people.

"We would have never chosen this site if there was any possibility of harm to people," responded the EPA's Borries.

The landfill is part of the Superfund site that stretches from the Kalamazoo River down three miles of Portage Creek and has contained PCBs for more than 50 years. Its design makes remote the chance that additional PCBs from the river sediment will pollute groundwater, EPA officials say.

Some of the material in the landfill has PCB concentrations of 2,500 parts per million. The highest levels of PCBs to be dumped at the site are 250 ppm, they say.

The case for cleanup

The toxic state of the Kalamazoo River was well-known long before the federal government in 1990 placed it on the National Priorities List, or Superfund list, for cleanup. Fish kills and other signs of pollution from dumping by companies recycling carbonless copy paper were obvious by the 1950s. An advisory against eating bass, carp, catfish and other species caught from areas of the river has been in place since the 1970s.

Through a process called "bioaccumulation," fish eat plankton or other plant life contaminated with PCBs, which gets stored in the fatty underbelly of the fish. The more PCBs consumed, the more danger to humans.

Depending on where fish live along the river, some are fine to eat in small quantities, while others shouldn't be consumed at all. A person can consume one fish per week with a level of .05 parts per million in them, according to Milt Clark, a PCB expert at the EPA's Region 5 Office in Chicago, but many fish in the river have 20 times that level in them.

"Even a fish that has 1 or 2 ppm can pose a threat if you eat enough of them, not to mention eating just one fish with very high levels of PCBs," he said. "It's very important to follow the fish advisories."

The highest levels of PCBs present in the stretch of river to be cleaned up are 200 to 250 ppm, Borries said. A concentration of 50 ppm is the standard the EPA uses to take removal action.

PCBs have been found to interfere with reproduction among bald eagles, mink and other species that live along the river, according to the EPA.

A few human studies have linked PCBs to slowed cognitive development in children exposed to them, while a National Cancer Institute study found an association between the level of PCBs in body tissue and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Swimming in the river, stepping in muck or soil along the river banks or even ingesting modest amounts of river water is "not a significant risk" to people, Clark said.

Eighty-eight percent of the soil or sediment most heavily laden with PCBs is to be removed from the 1.5-mile river site. The remaining 12 percent will be tested to determine if PCB concentrations are high enough to pose a threat to humans or animals.

Apart from where the river flows through downtown Plainwell, most of the stretch to be cleaned runs along state-owned land in nonresidential areas.

The Allegan **County News**



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Cleanup will return Kalamazoo River to its natural course

**By Ryan Lewis
Staff Writer**

Wednesday, March 21, 2007 11:19 AM EDT



This artist's rendering of the completed cleanup near the Plainwell dam shows how the partial removal of the dam will restore the natural course of the Kalamazoo River. (Graphic provided)

A vision of the future was unveiled in Plainwell last Thursday—a vision that included a partial dismantling of the Plainwell dam, a PCB-free riverbed and a river following its natural course.

In April, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will begin excavating PCB-laden sediment from the Kalamazoo River as part of a \$21 million, two-year project to clean a contamination “hot spot.”

At a public hearing in the cafeteria at Plainwell High School, Thursday, March 15, the EPA's onsite coordinator of the cleanup, Samuel Borries, revealed an artist's rendering of what he hopes the project will result in.

The project will remove 132,000 cubic yards of earth along 1.5 miles of the river containing an estimated 4,400 pounds of PCBs, an industrial chemical that has been known to cause cancer and other health-threatening illnesses.

The western portion of the Plainwell dam will be removed, as will portions of the riverbank and riverbed with contamination. This will allow the river to flow along its natural course. Following the excavation, the soil will be replaced and the area will be planted with native vegetation.

In his overview of the cleanup, he assured the audience that the EPA would decontaminate trucks hauling the contaminated sediment before they left the site.

He also said he will post progress reports on the project at www.epaosc.org/kzooplainwell.

Among the few local residents present was Plainwell city manager Eric Wilson, who reiterated that the cleanup would be vital to recreation and economic development in the area.

County commissioner Larry "Casey" Jones echoed that sentiment.

"I thought they'd never get to this point," Jones said, referring to the many years EPA has struggled to bring the former paper companies responsible for the contamination to commit money for remediation. "I think it's fantastic that it's happening in my lifetime, at least this part of the cleanup."

The hearing followed an open house earlier that afternoon at the district's administration building.

Many in attendance in the evening were residents of the Kalamazoo neighborhood where the contaminated sediment was destined for temporary disposal, at the Allied Paper landfill. The site, already storing more than a million cubic yards of PCB-contaminated sediment, is located in the southeast area of Kalamazoo near the intersection of Portage Road and Cork Street.

It is that sediment which actually made the site ideal for disposal, according to Borries. Made up of clay, which is resistant to groundwater movement, Borries said it would act as a barrier to the PCBs leaching into the surrounding soil.

Because The Allied Paper site is close to Plainwell, it made for a cost-effective site.

"If you use all of your money disposing of the waste, then you don't have enough to get rid of it in the first place," Borries told a skeptical audience of Kalamazoo homeowners. He pointed out that to dispose of the contamination at the EPA's disposal site in Detroit, it would have cost approximately \$14 million of the project's \$21 million.

EPA representatives were asked why the sediment wasn't being stored at Plainwell Inc.'s landfill, located much nearer to the clean-up. According to the EPA, the company was on the list of what the EPA terms "potentially responsible parties" that did not come to the negotiation table. Its landfill was not considered as a disposal site.

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